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Special Report

The European Security Conference: Progress and Problems

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EUROPEAN SECURITY CONFERENCE

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The European Security Conference: Progress and Problems

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which opened in July 1973, has reached another turning point. If progress is to be made when the talks resume in Geneva on September 2, Moscow will have to make some hard decisions.

The conference has been a centerpiece of Soviet foreign policy for many years. Its antecedents extend back into the 1950s. Originally, Moscow conceived it as an ersatz peace conference to confirm the postwar boundaries of a divided Germany. Subsequently, Brandt's Ostpolitik treaties formalized West German acceptance of the boundaries and conceded the Soviets much of what they desired from Bonn, but Moscow still wanted broader West European and US endorsement of the status quo.

Gradually, the Soviets began to see a security conference as a useful device to secure more forward-looking objectives. They hoped a successful outcome would facilitate their access to Western technological and financial resources. They also wanted the conference to create some kind of permanent body that would enable them to play a role in all European affairs.

At first, the Soviet proposal for a security conference was firmly opposed by the West. But after the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin had been signed in June 1972 and agreement had been reached to start force reduction talks, the NATO countries agreed to let the conference begin.

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Views from East and West

Most of the West Europeans by 1972 had begun to see certain opportunities in a security conference. Some of the smaller countries viewed it as a way of participating in detente. Bonn thought the conference would be a logical extension of its Ostpolitik. Paris viewed it as an opportunity for exercising independent diplomacy. The EC as a whole believed the conference would provide a chance to coordinate its policies toward the East.

Primarily, however, the West Europeans saw a chance to bring greater freedom to the people of Eastern Europe. They insisted that the conference take up the issue of the "freer movement of people and ideas" between East and West, and that it reach specific agreements in the "freer movements" area, not simply repeat pious principles.

The West Europeans also wanted specific "confidence-building" measures relating to military security as a corollary to further political relaxation. They are now reconciled to the fact that some of their suggestions for achieving detente—particularly the proposal concerning notification of military movements—will not be acceptable to Moscow in their present form.

The Soviets have persistently maintained that the conference should be brief and general, confining itself largely to endorsing broad principles. They have seemed distressed that it has dragged on this long, although Moscow now grudgingly admits that it is not surprising that a conference composed of 35 delegations representing two divergent systems and a wide variety of special interests has not reached easy agreement on a spectrum of complex issues.

The Western countries have presented a united front, partly because of the caucus of the EC countries at Geneva. By meeting regularly and producing an impressive number of position papers and drafts, they have maintained the West's momentum at the talks. After consultation with the US, the proposals of the EC group have frequently become the basis of Western positions.

The Soviets appear to have been genuinely surprised by the degree of unanimity on the Western side and by the support the West has received from the neutrals.

The Soviets will clearly have to concede more than they originally intended in order to bring the conference to a successful conclusion. During the last session from April 23 to July 26, 1974, the Soviet negotiators seemed to be in a strait jacket. While ritualistically insisting that they wanted the conference to end in July, they seemed unable or unwilling to make the necessary concessions.

The main promoters of detente in Moscow may not have been able to muster a consensus for further concessions on sensitive issues relating to discipline within the Soviet Union. Changes in some Western governments and political uncertainties in others may have caused the Soviets to pause until the outlook became clearer. Tactically, they may have decided it would be advantageous to hold out while testing the West's determination.

Issues

Many of the issues seem obscure or overly specialized, yet stripped of jargon, they reflect the larger problems in East-West relations. The emphasis on detail results partly from the West's desire to obtain specific benefits, rather than to join the Soviets in grandiose, but meaningless platitudes. The subject matter of the conference is divided into four substantive categories, or "baskets," on which working groups are trying to prepare documents for high-level approval at the third and final stage of the conference. The Soviets are still pressing for a summit-level conclusion. The "baskets" are:

- principles of international relations;
- cooperation in economics, science/technology, and the environment;

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- freer movement of people and ideas;
- follow-on machinery to the conference.

Basket I. So far, the working groups have succeeded in formulating statements on several of the principles to be contained in this basket. Agreement has been reached on inviolability of frontiers—a difficult statement and, in Soviet eyes, the most important—and considerable progress has been made on drafting the human rights principle. On the question of non-intervention in internal affairs, the West is trying to come up with phraseology that will inhibit Soviet assumptions of a right to intervene in the affairs of socialist states without interfering with Western desires to facilitate human contacts. The Yugoslavs and Romanians are also eager to prohibit various types of intervention. Resolution of this principle has been deferred until the next round.

Also included in Basket I are military-related "confidence-building measures." The Soviets were initially against including any military matters on the agenda, but have yielded to the strong support for this in the West. Only minor measures have been agreed on to date, such as exchange visits of military personnel, and bilateral and voluntary exchanges of observers at maneuvers. There are still sizable differences on notification of maneuvers, the major issue, although the differences are mainly quantitative, rather than conceptual. The Soviets have offered ten days notification, while the West would like seven weeks; Moscow wants notification of maneuvers at "army corps" level, the West whenever more than 12,000 men are involved; the Soviets are willing to give notification of maneuvers in a 100-kilometer border zone, while the West is holding to the formulation "in Europe"; the Soviets want to notify only neighboring states in the case of national maneuvers, while the West wants all conference participants notified of both national and multinational maneuvers. The West also would like a separate statement on the notification of movements, as distinguished from the measures on maneuvers themselves, but the Soviets have stated that "the time is not ripe" for consideration of this subject.

Basket II. The subjects in this basket—cooperation in economics, science and technology, and the environment—have been the least controversial. Nevertheless, some disagreements remain, such as arrangements for business contacts, that are not likely to be resolved until agreement is reached on Basket III. Other undecided issues specifically limited to the subject matter of Basket II include the West's desire for more reciprocity in exchanges of technology, and the East's interest in incorporating a statement on non-discrimination.

Basket III. The most intense controversy centers in this area, where the West is seeking practical measures to facilitate the "freer movement of people and ideas" to balance what it feels are Soviet gains in getting recognition of the existing frontiers in Basket I. But the Soviets, concerned about their domestic impact, want to minimize such contacts, which they regard as interference in internal affairs, and they want to include phraseology stating that contacts must be conducted in accordance with national "laws and customs"—in effect giving the Soviets the unilateral right to disregard any agreements governing such contacts.

In the last week of the previous session, a compromise proposed by the Finns and other neutrals cleared away one aspect of the problem. Since the West was unwilling to concede the Soviets a reference to "national laws and customs" in the preamble to Basket III, the neutrals proposed instead a reference to principles already agreed on for inclusion in the Basket I declaration of principles. A statement will appear in that declaration pledging participants to respect each country's right "to determine its laws and regulations," thus meeting some of Moscow's requirements. In an effort to balance this, there would be a reference elsewhere in the same declaration to the obligation to conform to international law and to "pay due regard to and implement the provisions of the final document" of the conference.

Even with the controversy over the preamble virtually eliminated, serious difficulties remain

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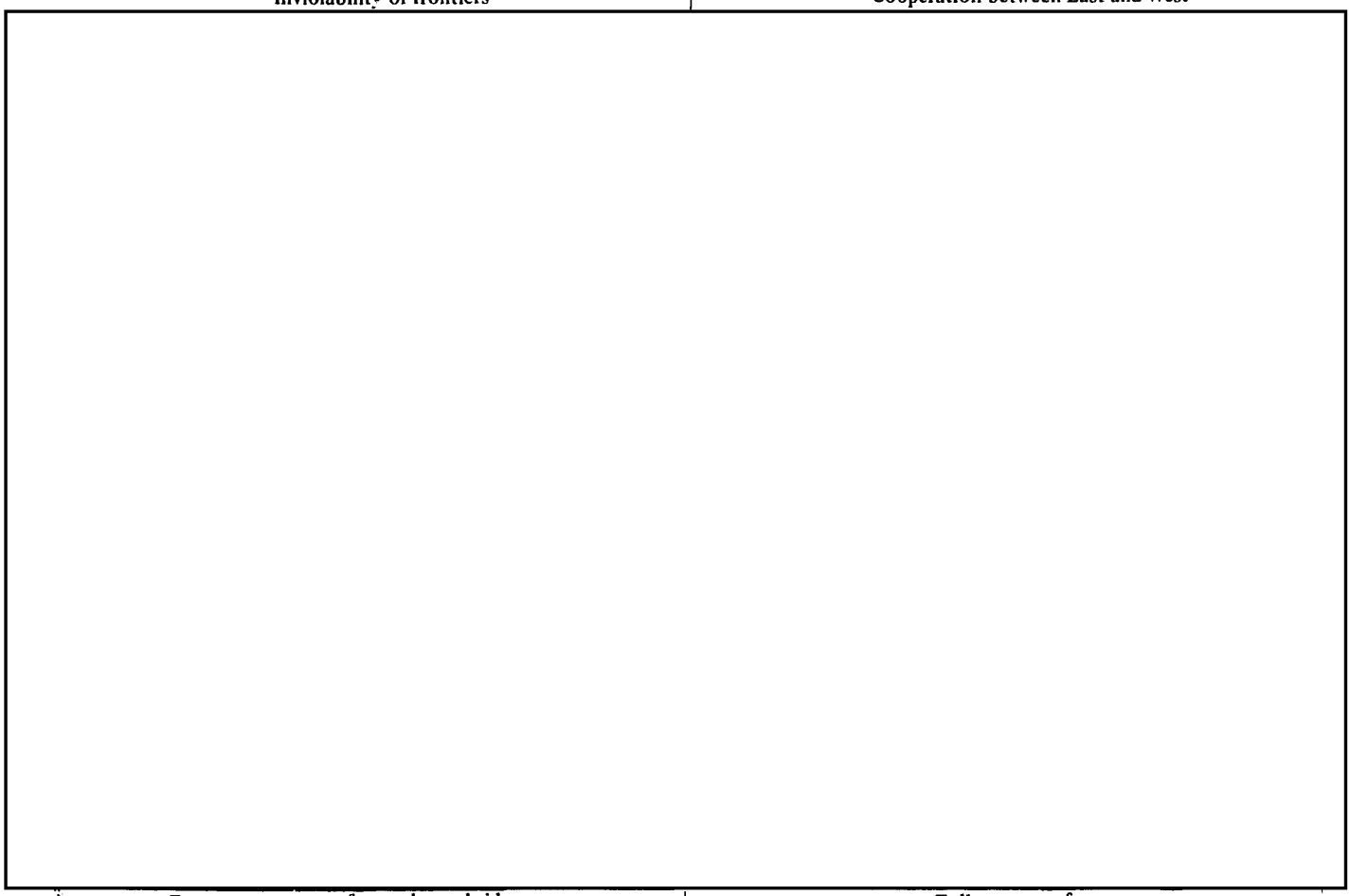
Inviolability of frontiers
Cooperation between East and West
Freer movement of people and ideas
Follow-on conference

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over many of the specific "freer movement" measures the West is seeking:

- Reunification of families. This is one of the most complex and troublesome issues. The Soviets are resisting Western efforts to allow emigrants to take with them savings and proceeds from the sale of personal belongings, or to emigrate to countries other than those participating in the conference. The Soviets are also resisting a clause intended to protect the rights of applicants for emigration.

- Simplification of procedures for marriages between nationals of different states. The Soviets do not want to allow these couples the right to settle in the country of their choice.

- Removal of obstructions to travel in other countries.

- Access to Western publications and more freedom for Western journalists in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

- Encouragement of contacts among scientists and educators and the opening of scientific and educational institutions to non-nationals.

- Western proposals to limit interference with foreign radio broadcasts. This has not come up for much discussion yet, but could be controversial when it does.

Basket IV. This category deals with follow-on machinery to the conference, originally strongly favored by the Soviets. As a result of opposition from the West, and the suspicious enthusiasm of Romania and Yugoslavia, they now seem willing to wait and see whether—if the conference succeeds—follow-on machinery will not develop automatically.

Agreement and Disagreement in the West

The US and the West Europeans are in almost total accord on the substance of the conference; EC and US papers presented in July differed only slightly. But there is considerable disagreement on tactics. The West Europeans think the US wants the conference over quickly, at practically any cost. They themselves are in no hurry, and are not willing to sacrifice any of their negotiating goals.

In the West European view, it is Soviet intransigence that has been holding up the conference. Last spring, the EC countries considered a number of steps they might take to force the Soviets to cooperate, including a call for indefinite adjournment of the conference. Although the EC countries decided against such extreme measures, their consideration of them is an index of the importance attached to the Western negotiating goals.

The West Europeans do not agree with the Soviet wish for an early summit conference, maintaining that one must not be held until "acceptable" results are obtained by the West and the general state of East-West relations is satisfactory. Prior to the last Nixon-Brezhnev summit in June 1974, many West Europeans were concerned that president Nixon, weakened domestically, might make a number of concessions to the Soviets, including agreement to a summit-level conclusion for the conference. Although their worst fears were not realized, several West Europeans felt that the communique came close to endorsing a summit meeting. The West European delegations in Geneva were particularly sensitive to the fact that the communique used traditional Soviet language in referring to a summit-level conclusion to the conference. Their resentment deepened as Eastern delegates began using the communique in their discussions with Western representatives.

Secretary Kissinger was able to persuade most of the allies that the US had not given in to the Soviets, but a subsequent US proposal that the West define its "essential" aims at the security conference and produce draft texts of specific minimum agreements, was met with widespread skepticism. It seemed to the West Europeans that the US was ready to sacrifice some of the Western goals in order to promote a speedy end to the conference.

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The West Europeans have no trouble with the idea of defining "essential" aims. But they do not want to present the Soviets with a specific outline of minimum Western objectives. This, they believe, would lead Moscow to equate the minimum Western goals with the maximum Eastern concessions, thus reducing the bargaining power of the West. The West will enter the fall session with this tactical dispute unresolved, since the EC nine will not have arrived at a formal position on the US proposal by then.

Progress at the security conference has been related to progress at the Vienna force reduction talks at crucial points in the history of the two negotiations. As the Conference on Security and Cooperation enters the home stretch this fall, that will again be the case. But the linkage is not likely to be beneficial, as there is unlikely to be enough progress at the force reduction talks to produce movement at the security conference. A break in the deadlock at the security conference on the other hand, may have a positive impact on the force reduction talks. The consensus of Allied representatives in Vienna is that the Soviets will continue to be stubborn at the force reduction negotiations as long as the security conference has not ended. Still, none of the West Europeans is in a mood to rush the security conference in order to promote progress in the force reduction talks.

The Outlook

While the Soviets would like the "freer movement" issue to go away—Gromyko has said that the best solution to the Basket III problem is to cut the bottom out—they undoubtedly realize that some show of flexibility is necessary to bring the conference to a successful conclusion, particularly a finale at the summit. When the conference resumes, the Soviets will attempt to make only those concessions necessary to keep it moving. At the same time, they will seek to protect their security interests from what they perceive as the danger of Western ideological subversion, to water down the Western proposals they consider most objectionable, and to introduce ambiguity into the wording of all "freer movement" items so that there will be room for subsequent "interpretations" that can be used to justify restrictive policies.

Moscow may ultimately decide that it can consider concessions on sensitive subjects such as freer movement as nothing more than paper agreements, subject to whatever limitations it later chooses to impose. For example, a provision for reading rooms could be undermined by subtle harassment of those using them. Hard bargaining seems in store on these issues. The Soviets are no doubt convinced by now that the West is capable of maintaining a firm position on major issues and probably see no gain from obstructionist tactics. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)